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## Group pushes Springfield to include sexual orientation and gender identity in protected category

February 22, 2012 | by Paula Morehouse and Justin Haase, KY3 News

SPRINGFIELD — They're not what state or federal law sees as a class of people protected from discrimination, but some are pushing for Springfield to create a new protected classes based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Mayor's Commission for Human Rights has submitted four proposed draft ordinances to the Springfield City Council that are designed to add the two aforementioned groups under the protected classes.

"It's to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people," said Stephanie Perkins, Deputy Director of PROMO.

Stephanie Perkins sat on the subcommittee that worked on the drafts, which call for the city to protect the two groups from housing, public accommodations, and employment discrimination.

Perkins said they just want the same rights as others. "It's because when you get an apartment, you say that you're roommates. It turns out that your landlord finds out that you're partners and it's totally legal for him or her to evict you based on that knowledge."

Federal and Missouri state law currently allow protection under seven categories: race, national origin, color, gender, religion, pregnancy, and disability.

The proposed ordinances would extend beyond both federal and state law.

"Other cities have done that, for example, Columbia has recently done that. So a municipality can do that even though those aren't federally protected classes," said Springfield City Manager Greg Burris.

A city can do it, but it should expect a fight from opponents.

"If I choose not to hire a transgender employee, that's my right. That's my constitutional right and I don't need the city of Springfield prosecuting me for failing to hire someone like that that I don't want to employ, that I don't think will fit into my office, and I have a strange suspicion that there's hundreds of other businesses in Springfield that probably feel the same way," said Dee Wampler, a Springfield defense attorney.

Wampler said this move by the Mayor's Commission is infringing upon the rights of Christians. "When we're told in our private business, or we're told who we hire at our churches, that we can hire or not hire certain individuals, I think we're one of the most discriminated classes in American today."

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The proposed ordinances will go to a committee for more discussion or they could go straight to a public hearing.

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